

**Commencement ceremony**  
**Ifrane, June 12, 2010**  
**Chancellor's speech**

Mr. President,  
Fellow Board members,  
Dear members of the faculty and staff,  
Dear students and parents,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first thank, on behalf of all of us, **Mr. Steven Knapp**, President of George Washington University and member of AUI Board of Trustees, who kindly agreed to be our Guest of Honor at this ceremony. He made a long trip from the U.S. East Coast to be with us today.

June 12, 2010, will certainly be a memorable day for many of us, especially our new graduates.

We are gathered here to celebrate the culmination of an educational journey and the graduation of a new class of Al-Akawayn University, the 13<sup>th</sup> since its inception. I join the Board members in congratulating our graduates and express our pride in the efforts they have made over the years spent in this beautiful campus.

The past year —like the previous ones— was eventful, with its share of happiness and sorrow. I am sure that the attendance today would join me in paying a special tribute to **late Abdelaziz Meziane Belfkih**, who passed away a little over a month ago. As you all know, late Meziane Belfkih, who was Advisor to His Majesty the King, was —among others— a member of AUI Board of Trustees.

A special tribute also goes to **late Azeddine Laraki**, the first Chancellor of Al-Akhawayn University who notably served as Prime Minister and as Minister of Education, and who died early February.

The self-denial of these two men in the service of their country, and their human and professional qualities will make their memory ever-lasting and never-fading in this institution and in the educational arena to which they contributed so much.

Mr. President,  
Fellow Board members,  
Dear members of the faculty and staff,  
Dear students and parents,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

After the major strides made over the last five years in the University's priority areas, namely the educational, organizational and administrative foundations, the new **2010-2014 Strategic Plan** —the second since the establishment of the University— aims to help AUI strengthen its position among the best academic institutions. This goes through consolidating the gains achieved so far, increasing AUI's ability to adapt and accelerating its development.

A real roadmap for the coming years, the Plan sets new priorities for the University, centered on the following seven areas:

1. Reinforcement of the North-American educational system;
2. Adoption of quality assurance and accreditation;
3. Development and growth;
4. Internationalization of the University;
5. Innovation and leadership in education;
6. Human capital development;
7. Attainment of financial sustainability.

Among these key objectives, I would particularly like to highlight that of **accreditation**. Once completed, this ambitious project—which we initiated on a proactive basis— will provide unquestionable international recognition both to the University and to its individual schools. Achieving this goal will indeed crown the efforts Al-Akhwayn has undertaken for several years now on the academic and organizational levels.

With regards to the **development** of the University, increasing the number of students remains a key goal. To this end, every effort will be made to raise the student population by 50 percent in 2014. Recent figures are encouraging, as the number of registrants was 11 percent up in 2009-2010, despite an ever-rigorous selection process. The 1550-student mark has now been exceeded.

This result is the outcome of the attractiveness that the University has gained and the unique educational model it boasts. It is also the effect of efforts geared to improve the **infrastructure** by expanding accommodation capacity and upgrading computing and academic facilities, as well as by enhancing the **scholarship and financial aid program** that now benefits nearly 30 percent of our students.

But we must keep in mind that despite these achievements, the road is still long, with many challenges to face.

One of the primary challenges is the **internationalization of the Campus**, which has yielded good results so far but deserves to be further developed. Today, approximately 40 percent of our alumni —about one in every two students— have taken part in exchange programs that allowed them to attend prestigious universities and schools in the United States, Europe and Asia. In turn, students from nearly 35 U.S. and international universities come to Ifrane for one or two semesters. Nevertheless, our ambitions for Al-Akawayn are still higher, and we look forward to more achievements in this area.

We also expect the University's **corporate communication**, which has been reinforced qualitatively, to contribute more to the development of Al-Akawayn and to its reputation. Surely enough, this work is incumbent on other University officials too and on everyone else on this Campus.

All these actions and challenges need adequate support. As you well know, the Board of Trustees has already expressed its commitment to sustain the strategic choices of Al-Akawayn by making the necessary contribution to their fulfillment. On this occasion, I reaffirm that the Board's commitment will continue.

Beyond this unwavering commitment, the University's success and the implementation of its vision require the contribution of all its components.

In this regard, I wish to pay a special tribute to the outstanding community work carried out by the “**Hand in Hand Association**” to the benefit of the region’s population, yielding concrete and tangible results. “Hand in Hand” has, for instance, succeeded on the occasion of the last “Fun Run” to raise about one million dirhams, which will go to providing drinkable water and electricity for 5 schools.

I also commend the work and enthusiasm of **Al-Akhawayn Alumni Association** that elected its new board in September 2009, and successfully organized, only a few months later, the “Job Fair”. The recent edition of this important annual gathering saw a record participation of job providers. Congratulations to the new team, and sincere thanks to the former one and to its President for their contributions.

I therefore call on the Alumni Association to carry on with this positive spirit, and reiterate my wish for a close collaboration with the University staff in the elaboration of an **Alumni Directory** that would be a comprehensive and updated reference of all former students. Such action is indeed necessary to strengthen the cohesion of AUI community and build up a strong and efficient alumni network!

Mr. President,  
Fellow Board members,  
Dear members of the faculty and staff,  
Dear students and parents,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Since its creation in 1995, Al-Akawayn University has prepared **13 classes**, with a total of 2,400 graduates, most of whom quickly joined the job market. Their contributions in their respective fields of work won them several academic and professional honors. The latest figures indicate that 85 percent of them opted for working in Morocco while the remaining 15 percent choose either to work abroad or to complete their studies in other countries.

Obviously, credit for such outstanding results mostly goes to the high-quality **faculty** —which the University can be proud of— as well as to the **administrative staff**. May they find here a sincere expression of our profound gratitude!

The graduation of the 13<sup>th</sup> Class of Al-Akawayn University comes at particular times in which Morocco experiences rapid and deep-seated economic, technological, cultural and social changes.

In this context, the impact of the recent global crisis on Morocco was relatively limited due to its solid economic fundamentals and to the momentum of its economic and financial sectors, as well as to the large-scale actions undertaken both at sectoral and country levels.

The **Casablanca International Financial Center**, launched last April by His Majesty, is one of the flagship projects that would contribute to bolstering Morocco's development, modernization and regional positioning. It is part of an overall vision to turn Casablanca into a regional financial hub, a challenge I consider interesting, ambitious and realistic!

Our University, which has chosen to support a few years ago the Government's strategy to train "10,000 Engineers", can play an important role in accompanying this project as well.

Dear Students, "13<sup>th</sup> Class of Al-Akhawayn",

Commencement day is an end, but it is also a beginning.

It marks the end of long years of hard work and sacrifices, from you as well as your families who believed in you and gave you their support. It also and most importantly signals the beginning of a new era where opportunities are abound and challenges ever-renewed.

I remain confident in your ability to successfully make your way, building on the training you received in Al-Akhawayn. Keep looking forward and stay perseverant, take initiative and be daring.

I wish every one of you the success he deserves and thank you for your attention.